

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, August 22, 2014

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September 1: Program Quality Improvement [grantees](#) reports due
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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Students, families, teachers, school leaders prepare for start of 2014-15 school year

I adore summer, but I have to admit that the end of summer is my favorite season, as children, families, and teachers get ready for the start of another great school year. Teachers are preparing their classrooms and their instructional materials while children and their families are gathering school supplies, reflecting on a summer of fun and learning, and looking ahead to new classmates, new subjects, and sometimes even to a new school.

As I have noted to you in previous Field Memos, we will be working on a number of exciting initiatives during the 2014-15 school year, including introducing blended learning into schools and classrooms, providing greater access to rigorous high-school courses such as advanced placement and dual enrollment, and laying the groundwork for development of our next strategic plan.

This year also marks a moment we've been working toward since 2010. We are entering the second full year of implementation of the Common Core State Standards. I know that you and your team have been hard at work developing new curricula and new classroom practices that will help all of our students meet these standards. Over the past four years, we have devoted a lot of time and resources toward transition to the Common Core, and we will continue to provide schools with support to help all educators put the Common Core into action.

This year, as you know, we will introduce new state assessments that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Students will no longer take their state assessments in October, as they have done for the past nine years. Instead, we will administer assessments in the spring, toward the end of the school year, which will help integrate these assessments into daily classroom instruction. We will offer these assessments, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), on tablets or laptops for most students – and for all students, eventually. We did a trial run of PARCC assessments last year, which ran smoothly in Rhode Island and in the 11 other PARCC states as well.

As we begin this new school year, I know we will all do our best to make sure that every classroom in Rhode Island is a great place for teaching and learning.

2. Rhode Island to focus on reducing chronic absenteeism during coming school year

As all of us are aware, if we are to advance student achievement in our state we have to do our best to make sure that students attend school regularly and that they come to school rested, well-nourished, and ready to learn.

That's why this year we will be focusing attention on improving school attendance and drastically reducing chronic absenteeism (missing 10 percent of the school year, or about 18 school days). To advance these efforts, we will provide you with examples of best practices aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism and we will provide you technical support and assistance to help you track chronic absenteeism in your LEA.

A statewide picture of chronic absenteeism is important to help meet this challenge. We are proud that Rhode Island is the leading state when it comes to publishing data on chronic absenteeism. Our data on chronic absenteeism from the previous school year (2013-14) will be ready for publication next week. Previous data reports on chronic absenteeism are available on the Rhode Island [DataHUB](#).

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has also been a leader in the effort toward reducing chronic absenteeism and the will be part of our effort on this initiative. Additionally, a national nonprofit, Attendance Works, will be a resource for us as we work together on this issue. I encourage you to look at the Attendance Works

[messaging materials](#), which contain useful information suggestions about communications regarding improving student attendance.

3. Federal grant opportunity announced for preschool development

Last week, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services announced a \$250-million [Preschool Development Grants](#) competition for states (see [fact sheet](#) and [blog post](#)). In announcing this opportunity, Education Secretary Arne Duncan said:

Through Preschool Development Grants, we continue our efforts to create educational opportunities that prepare our youngest Americans for success in kindergarten, through elementary school and beyond. This new grant competition will prepare states to participate in the President's proposed [Preschool for All](#) program – a federal-state partnership that would promote access to full-day kindergarten and encourage the expansion of high-quality preschool programs for four-year-olds from low- and middle-income families. We urge states and communities to seize this opportunity, form partnerships, and begin drafting their proposals for the program, because providing high-quality early learning opportunities is the most important single step we can take to improve the future of our young people.

RIDE staff members participated in a webinar this week on this grant opportunity, and we are planning to apply for one of the Preschool Development grants. If you and your team would like to work in partnership with us in developing the grant application, please let me know and we will include you in further discussions.

4. RISSA honors Barry Ricci as Superintendent of the Year

Congratulations to Barry Ricci, whom the members of the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association have honored as the 2015 Rhode Island Superintendent of the Year. Barry has been the Superintendent of the Chariho Regional Schools for 9 years, and he previously served as assistant superintendent for 4 years. The Chariho students have made considerable gains in achievement levels during Barry's tenure as superintendent, and all of us recognize Barry as a thoughtful leader, creative thinker, and bold innovator. In granting Barry this award, fellow superintendents note his work toward providing instruction in world languages beginning in kindergarten and to reaching a 1:1 ratio for electronic devices at Chariho Regional High School. Here at RIDE, Barry has been a key member of our ad hoc committee reviewing graduation requirements. RISSA has made a great selection in presenting Barry with this award!

From RIDE

Next Generation Science Standards:

5. Districts, schools to select cadre of educators to serve as liaisons on Next Generation Science Standards

A major goal of our Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Implementation Plan is to foster awareness and understanding of the new state science standards among all educators and stakeholders in our state. To help support this goal, RIDE and the Rhode Island Strategic Leadership Team (RISLT) for the NGSS is proposing the creation of a cadre of volunteer educators to strengthen NGSS outreach to all educators in our schools. The

NGSS Liaisons will serve as a conduit between the RISLT and their colleagues in their schools. This networking of communication is a two-way process. NGSS-specific information, tools, and resources will be shared with NGSS Liaisons by the RISLT, and questions and concerns at the school level can also be communicated directly to the RISLT by the NGSS Liaisons.

Qualifications and Expectations

NGSS Liaisons are educators who exemplify the following:

- they are seen as teacher leaders by their colleagues;
- they are full-time educators who teach science at the PK-12 level;
- they have a working knowledge of the National Research Council *Framework for K-12 Science Education* and of the NGSS;
- they are effective communicators of information; and
- they have involvement with NGSS activities.

NGSS Liaisons are expected to:

- share information sent from the RISLT with their colleagues at the school level;
- serve as a conduit for information to the RISLT with respect to the needs and questions expressed by their colleagues; and
- participate in the quarterly RISLT meetings held throughout the year (Note: As the size of the NGSS cadre increases, a separate set of meetings may be scheduled).

Additionally, NGSS Liaisons are encouraged to join one of the RISLT ad hoc committees.

Selection of school based NGSS Liaisons would be a decision made by administration at the district or school level. Building principals and district leadership have awareness of educators who possess the necessary qualifications. Educators are free to volunteer; however, the decision for selection resides with the building or district administration. Throughout the selection process, leaders should emphasize that this is a voluntary position but there is a level of commitment to ensure that the process builds capacity.

Timeline:

- September 12: – School-level NGSS Liaisons are identified and the names and contact information are sent to RIDE.
- Late September – Orientation for NGSS Liaisons (via webinar)

We will send further information to all LEAs next week. If you have questions about the NGSS Liaisons, please contact Peter McLaren, Science and Technology Specialist (peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov or 222-8454).

Early Learning:

6. RIDE issues three requests for proposals for vendors to support Exceed initiatives

RIDE has issued a three requests for proposals from vendors: one to develop and provide research and technical assistance regarding improving facilities for early learning, a second to serve as a business and data-governance lead for the early-learning

project team, and a third to support building and data system on early learning. These proposals are on behalf of the Exceed coalition that is overseeing the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge federal grant. For information on these requests for proposals, see:

<http://us7.campaign-archive1.com/?u=3d18b7a1497e7cd9440bb20d5&id=850ce84490&e=4c58f9bf62>

Common Core State Standards:

7. RIDE accepting applications for partnerships to support mathematics educators in grades 3 through 5

RIDE is pleased to announce that we will be accepting applications for the Mathematics Science Partnership grant, Enhancing Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Skill with the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. The terms of the grant require the establishment of a partnership between an LEAs and an Institute for Higher Education (IHE) with the intent of designing a professional development experience for mathematics educators in grades 3 through 5. The four main goals of the project are:

- to improve educators' content knowledge in grades 3 – 5 by engaging in high-quality professional development grounded in the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CCSS-M);
- to improve educators' pedagogical skill in grades 3 – 5 by engaging in high-quality professional development that leverages the Standards for Mathematical Practice in the CCSS-M;

- to create a system to support and coach educators in their endeavor to apply new content knowledge and pedagogical skill in the classroom while delivering a district mathematics curriculum that is based on the CCSS-M; and
- to develop a cadre of teacher leaders, comprised of exemplary educators from each grade level (3 – 5) and school, who will assist in the facilitation and sustainability of the project.

RIDE will host a meet-and-greet session on Thursday, **September 11**, from 8:15 – 9 a.m., in room 406, for LEAs and IHEs to come together and explore the possibility of establishing a working partnership. Please contact Mona Gevorkian, at 222-8490 or mona.gevorkian@ride.ri.gov, to register.

The grant application and support materials can be accessed from the RIDE website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Mathematics.aspx>

Complete applications must be submitted by Tuesday, September 30, by 4:00.

If you have questions about this grant, please contact Susan Pagliaro, at 222-2644 or susan.pagliaro@ride.ri.gov, or Patricia Carnevale, at 222-8458 or patricia.carnevale@ride.ri.gov.

School Directory:

8. RIDE asks LEAs to update their Master Directory information by August 29 – *Action Item*

The Master Directory is used during the year to communicate to LEAs and to update RIDE ListSrvs. It is imperative that LEAs update their Master Directories at this time. Although all listings in the directory are important, the following are mandatory:

Districts/LEAs:

- Superintendent
- Business Manager
- Special Ed Director
- Director of Technology
- Data Manager
- District Testing Coordinator

Schools:

- Principal
- School Testing Coordinator
- School (guidance) Counselor(s) (all)

If you have any questions about the Mastery Director information, please contact our helpdesk, at <https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

Transportation:

9. RIDE announces changes to Statewide Transportation Program

As part of a recent RFP process, we are pleased to announce that services under the Statewide Transportation Program will be provided by two vendors, First Student and Ocean State. This expansion will provide greater flexibility along with the

opportunities for future expansion of services. Under our management contract with TransPar, we are also pleased to announce the addition of Linda Parker to the team; Linda will serve as the manager for the TransPar team providing routing, customer assistance, and financial services to the program. Additional details will be provided early next week, but we wanted to share this exciting news with you and to assure you that we will continue to strive to provide the best to the students, families, and districts we serve. If you have any questions concerning the changes, please contact Cynthia Brown, Director of Statewide Efficiencies, at Cynthia.Brown@ride.ri.gov or 222-4257.

From the U.S. Department of Education

10. U.S. Department of Education sends letter to stakeholders on career, technical, and adult education

Johan Uvin, the Acting Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (and the former Adult Education Director at RIDE) has sent a [Dear Colleague](#) letter to all stakeholders apprising them of new developments in adult learning. He has asked that we share this letter with career-technical and adult-education programs. In part, his letter says:

We could not have achieved this level of attention and priority on adults with low skills in the national conversation without the support and leadership of many individuals ... Much of this support was also facilitated by the good work many of you in the adult education, career and technical education, and community college systems have done.

Additionally, an important factor in the last decade was the increase of strong performance data in the adult education system and the high quality data and findings from the OECD *Survey of Adult Skills*.

From other state offices, agencies

11. Attorney General's Office to visit high schools for program about texting while driving

At the request of the Office of the Attorney General, we will distribute this message to all high-school principals:

Dear Principal,

For the past two school years, I have partnered with the R.I. State Police, the R.I. Department of Transportation (RIDOT), and AT&T to bring AT&T's powerful "Txtng & Drivng...It Can Wait" awareness campaign to schools across the state. To date, we have made 41 school visits from North Smithfield to New Shoreham, where nearly 15,000 students took a pledge to never text while driving.

I strongly believe the video and presentation have had a big impact on the students. In school after school, the whole auditorium was silent when the lights came up after a compelling documentary that told the story of real teens whose lives had been forever impacted by texting while driving. In addition to the short documentary, we also demonstrate a driving simulator to show students just how much texting while behind the wheel affects a driver's ability to maintain control of a vehicle.

While the program was very well received by the students, this is an issue that will not go away any time soon – and, each year there is a new group of young drivers who face the temptation to text while driving.

I am pleased to announce that once again, the Office of Attorney General will continue its partnership to bring the “It Can Wait” program to Rhode Island high schools. By sharing the sobering consequences of texting while driving, we hope to change young drivers’ attitudes about the subject and encourage the public, especially younger drivers, to put away cell phones while behind the wheel.

With the new school year about to begin, we are starting to schedule visits to Rhode Island schools. I urge you to participate in this important program. To schedule a date for us to bring the It Can Wait program to your school, please contact Emily Martineau in my office, at (401) 274-4400 ext. 2007 or emartineau@riag.ri.gov.

Sincerely,
Peter F. Kilmartin

12. RIHEAA schedules professional development sessions on use of WaytogoRI

Please see this notice from the R.I. Higher Education Assistance Authority:

The R.I. Higher Education Assistance Authority (RIHEAA) is pleased to announce that the new Individual Learning Plan (ILP) on WaytogoRI has been completed. The improvements provide enhanced reporting capability and the flexibility to

customize the ILP to specific populations of students and to align with the Rhode Island ILP requirements. RIHEAA will offer four ILP-training workshops:

WaytogoRI ILP Training Workshop for district-level leadership

2 sessions – September 22 and September 24

This one-day training is geared toward the district leaders who have responsibility for overall implementation and the customization of the ILP on WaytogoRI for their school or district. The district lead will be the “go to” person for support and questions about the ILP process in their schools. Goals for the leadership training are:

- to gain an understanding of the benefits of the WaytogoRI ILP;
- to learn how to develop an implementation plan for delivering the ILP to students, at a school or district level; and
- to learn how to customize the ILP to meet the needs for your school or district.

WaytogoRI ILP Training Workshop for practitioners

2 sessions – September 23 and September 25

This one-day training is geared toward teachers and counselors who will be utilizing the customized ILP in the classroom or advisory with their students. The goals of the training are to learn:

- how to guide students in the use of the WaytogoRI ILP;

- how to complete student activities in the ILP;
- how to run reports that track usage and provide information on the careers and colleges, etc.; and
- how to review an individual student's ILP.

Please fill out the attached form (WaytogoRI registration form 8-22-14) and RSVP to Lisa Shevlin, at RIHEAA, at lshevlin@riheaa.org by **August 29**. Space will be limited and locations will be based on attendance. When responding, please provide the school name, participant's name, and contact information. Be sure to include your selection of Workshop A (September 22 or 24) or B (September 23 or 25).

Enjoy the rest of the summer hope to see you in September.

From other organizations

13. Amgen offers science-education program for teachers

Please see this notice about a science-education program from Amgen; the program has sites in Rhode Island:

The Amgen Biotech Experience is an innovative science education program that provides teacher professional development, curriculum materials, and research-grade equipment and supplies to middle and high schools. The program features a hands-on molecular biology curriculum designed to introduce students to the excitement of scientific discovery. Each year, over 50,000 students and hundreds of science teachers participate in this program and have the opportunity to explore the methods scientists use

to create biotechnology medicines. The reach of the program has been extraordinary, with over 300,000 students to date having experienced the fundamentals of biotechnology across multiple U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and the U.K. For more information, see:

<https://www.amgenbiotechexperience.com/about/what-we-do>

14. Technology teachers to hold annual meeting in Providence on November 14, 15

Please see this message from Jeffrey Macari, of the New England Association of Technology Teachers:

As conference chairman, I am proud to welcome you to the 77th Annual New England Association of Technology Teachers (NEATT) Conference being held at Johnson & Wales University in Providence on November 14 and 15. This year we are inviting science and math teachers to join us. With that in mind the Conference Committee is offering a wide variety of STEM-related workshops that will be helpful and interesting for all. The conference theme, “Technology and Engineering: Bringing the Skills to Science and Math (STEM),” dictates that the committee offers a variety of workshops and activities that will be helpful and informative to all science, math, and technology teachers, elementary to high school. After attending the NEATT conference, you will return to your classroom with a renewed vision of STEM for your students.

Our keynote speaker started his career as an industrial arts teacher; Mr. Fay Butler is the owner of Fay Butler Fab/Metal

Shaping, in Wheelwright, Massachusetts. He is dedicated to the education of craftsmen through material science. One of his areas of expertise is the subject of creating compound curves through stretching and shrinking of metal. Fay uses the science behind the material and breaks this procedure down to the atomic level. He is a huge advocate of technology, math, and science education, serving the aircraft, automotive, architectural, and art industries from early development concepts to reproduction of production parts. We are sure you will enjoy him.

Please watch our promotional video on **YouTube**:

<http://youtu.be/ttsUQTW-iGU> (or use the key word NEATT).

15. Nominees sought for public-service awards

Please see this notice from the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council:

The Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council is seeking nominees for:

- The Robert M. Goodrich Distinguished Public Service Award will recognize an outstanding local employee; and
- The Gary S. Sasse Distinguished Public Service Award will recognize an outstanding state employee.

The Awards are named in honor of the late Robert M. Goodrich, RIPEC's first Executive Director, and Gary S. Sasse,

RIPEC's former Executive Director, who were staunch advocates for improving State and local public service throughout their careers. The thirty-ninth annual award recipients will be recognized at RIPEC's annual meeting on October 20.

Nominees for the Awards must have a total of at *least five years* of non-elective, full-time public service in Rhode Island state and/or local government. It is not required that the nominee's position be part of a civil service or merit system, and non-supervisory as well as supervisory personnel are eligible.

The qualifications of nominees will be reviewed by a selection committee, which will determine the final recipients. Please be sure to include in your nomination specific examples to showcase the accomplishments of the nominee pertaining to the overall criteria and performance objectives listed:

- sustained superior performance in the service of the Rhode Island taxpayer;
- fiscal responsibility and business acumen;
- record of integrity and devotion to public service;
- personal initiative and resourcefulness; and
- diligence and productivity.

Nominations for the awards should be sent no later than Monday, **September 15**. They should be addressed to: Ms. Paula Twidale, Chair, The Goodrich & Sasse Public Service Awards Committee, c/o Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council, 86 Weybosset Street, 5th Floor, Providence 02903. Please include your nominee's name, current

position, history of public service, and a list of significant accomplishments for the selection committee's review. Since the committee may require further information on your nominee, please include your name, address, and telephone number with your information.

16. \$1-million educator award announced

Please see this notice from the Global Teacher Prize Team:

Do you know a teacher worthy of recognition and celebration? Help us find one exceptional educator who deserves to be recognized around the world! The Global Teacher Prize, a \$1-million award from the Varkey GEMS Foundation, will be given to an exceptional teacher who has made an outstanding contribution to the profession – the first time an award of this size has been given to a teacher.

The prize is open to currently working teachers who teach children that are in compulsory schooling, or are below the age of 18. The prize is open to teachers in every kind of school and, subject to local laws, in every country in the world. The closing date for applications will be October 5, and the winner will be announced at the Global Education and Skills Forum 2015 in Dubai.

For more information, see: [Global Teacher Prize](#).

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>